

*three papers presented at a
national meeting of Priests' councils*

the time to build

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Reprinted from the April 1958 issue of *The Priest*,
Noll Plaza, Huntington, Indiana 46750

Printed in the U.S.A. by
OUR SUNDAY VISITOR INC.
Huntington, Indiana 46750



Introduction

A MEETING of Priests' Councils from throughout the United States was held at the Sheraton-O'Hare Motor Hotel, Des Plaines, Illinois. Attending the two-day meeting, February 12-13, were 328 representatives from 113 diocesan senates and associations.

Three papers delivered during this meeting form the contents of this brochure. Reverend Robert Kennedy of the Diocese of Brooklyn presents a review of a survey he had conducted concerning the present status of priests' councils. Reverend Raymond G. Decker of the Archdiocese of San Francisco offers some goals and guidelines as well as a clarification of terms. Reverend John J. Hill of the Archdiocese of Chicago presents a rationale for a national organization.

A constitutional convention is scheduled to meet May 13-14 in order to draft a constitution for a National Conference of Priests' Councils. **OUR SUNDAY VISITOR** is both pleased and privileged to offer this brochure to every diocesan priest in the United States. It is our hope that it will facilitate communication among the Catholic clergy of our nation.

VINCENT A. YZERMANS
Editor



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Chapter 1

A Review of Priests' Councils

Rev. Robert Kennedy

AS often happens when a subject is discussed at an agenda meeting what is supposed to be said seems clear and quite simple to put together. Once an attempt to put it down on paper begins, the clarity of the idea begins to fuzz and the difficulties become much more apparent. The topic of this paper suffered this very process.

Information about Priests' Senates is hard to come by and still harder to reduce to generalizations and simple clear ideas. The source material is quite diverse. Three Regional Meetings gave much of the detail and the necessary flavor to keep it from being a dry and abstract gathering of statistics. The Mid-West meeting held in late September, and a New England meeting held right after Christmas enabled me to meet with Senators and Association officers from two of the most populated regions of our country. Extensive minutes of the meeting in New

Orleans were forwarded to me. Besides this a five-page questionnaire was filled out by the President or Secretary of 63 Senates. The newsletter *Crux*, published a four-page tabulation of facts about the status of senates in our country. Senates have been most cooperative in sending minutes of their senate meetings and some fifty constitutions have been analyzed.

Probably the most important single element in putting this paper together has been the opportunity to meet people who are involved in this very wonderful work of putting collegiality at the diocesan level into practice and by discussing with them their work, their hopes and their successes. This is the way one is able, in a sense, to get the pulsebeat of what is happening throughout the country.

According to the survey made by *Crux*, the first senate in the country was established in Springfield, Massachusetts on January 20, 1966. Worcester, Massachusetts,

claims to be the first, using March 1965 as their birth date. Sioux Falls, S.D., had its operating in March, followed by Galveston, Texas in April, Grand Island, Nebraska and Norwich, Connecticut in May and Albany, New York and Dubuque, Iowa by June. All this took place before the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* was issued on August 6, 1966. Forty-five senates were in operation by the end of 1966 and 135 by the first of the year. In other words there was a most eager response by the bishops and our country to decrees of Vatican II and the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, at least in regard to senates.

Started in 1966

In many dioceses Associations of Priests had also sprung up, alongside the Senates. Chicago and Brooklyn having founded theirs by June of 1966 and now more than 40 of these exist throughout the country. Not satisfied with a general type of Priests' Association, Associations of Priests active in Inner City or Negro work have been established in several dioceses and at least two organizations exclusively for pastors exist.

Senates are now finally established and strongly organized in almost all of our dioceses. Some 80 examples of the constitutions are available upon request and have been swapped back and forth and the Senate in Brooklyn alone received 200 requests for copies of its constitution. Most dioceses, however, claim to have written

their own without outside borrowing; only in one diocese did the chancery do it for the senate.

The thing that is most interesting about this, is that the development is almost completely outside the law, concerning senates as expressed in the *Motu Proprio* and the Conciliar Decrees. There was a vacuum not covered by law even though there was much talk in the *Motu Proprio* about "the form expressed by law"; the revision of Canon Law has just not been completed. *American principles of democracy moved in and filled the void.*

Due to our political history, it is hard for us to envision a group of people working together without some form of constitution or by-laws to guide them. Interestingly enough, the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* in paragraph 76 expresses the need for written constitutions. "The constitution of each should be drawn up, phrased in correct juridical terminology which prescribes the manner of designating the officials along with their mutual relations, the spheres of their competency, the forms and systems they are obliged to follow in performing their office."

Continuity

As senates are made up in most cases by representatives elected by the priests of each diocese and are solidly organized by a quasi-judicial constitution, they tend very strongly to have a group life of their own, which seems to be in opposition to the concept of the

senate "dying with the bishop." A very long debate on this subject at the New England meeting of senates was held, but came to no conclusion; basically because there is a saving clause in the *Motu Proprio* allowing for the continuation of senates in exceptional cases and it was felt that this was not yet used. Others that have the association or whole presbytery as their base with an executive board as the senate avoid the problem in this way. Some 15 Sees have become vacant which had senates. Many of them have been asked by the Apostolic Administrator to keep some of their committee functions alive.

Discussion Point

In the Camden Diocese, when told they were to dissolve themselves, the senate voted to reorganize itself as an Association and keep in operation. In Wilmington, the senate was confirmed in existence by the Apostolic Administrator and this was agreed to by the Apostolic Delegate in Washington. The survey indicated that nine senates throughout the country had debated this issue and one senate has considered a strong letter expressing its desire to stay in existence to be forwarded to the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese by its President as soon as the See is vacant.

The National Conference of Bishops will have to discuss this topic as part of its agenda at some time and it is hoped that some national representation of

priests' senates will be available to discuss this point with them.

Related to this is the question of election of bishops itself. When the See in St. Louis was vacant, two priests signed a petition along with several laymen of the diocese asking for a voice in the selection of the next archbishop. Five hundred and sixty-three priests of the New York Archdiocese recently petitioned for the same thing. The new Priests' Association in that diocese was very instrumental in gathering these signatures. In Wilmington, the petition for a voice in electing the Bishop was forwarded by the Priests' Council to Cardinal Sheehan, the Metropolitan of the See of Wilmington and he has responded by setting up a procedure by which suggestions could be received as to who their new bishop is to be.

First Step

It has been suggested by several sources that priests' senates be given the function of diocesan consultor in voting for the Apostolic Administrator who governs the diocese during the *interregnum*. As this would be a very open indication of the will of the priests of the diocese if their senate would pick a man truly *episcopabile* the *Congregatio Episcoporum* would be under pressure of public opinion to take this fact into consideration. This might be a very logical first step toward a more general scheme for the election of bishops by the priests of the diocese.

Organically most senates structured themselves into various committees and then started to prepare proposals. Two facts evolved that are very important for understanding where Priests' Councils now stand. First, the most popular committees dealt with personnel problems and problems of the continuing education of priests. That while most senates feel their area of competence is governing of the whole diocese, they have as a matter of fact placed the largest amount of their emphasis on priests' problems. In the reports in the survey 20 dioceses have established personnel committees as a result of senate action. An additional 11 have some sort of grievance committees. Many dioceses have committees on the education of priests and in at least 25 they are part of the senate. Of the 63 who reported, in only 8 does the senate have any structure by which they can have something to say on seminary training.

One-third of the dioceses answering questionnaires have definite programs for the retirement of priests. Only 8 of these reported that the diocesan retirement plan was due to senate action. The favorite retirement age was 75 with only a few having 70 as a mandatory age.

Raising Morale

Thus we see when the senates have taken on responsibility for many priests' problems this has had the effect of raising morale in many areas, enabling priests to

feel a deeper concern of the Church for them as persons. What many of the senates have to learn from this is that by taking personnel out of the hands of the Chancery Office, they are in a sense performing the same function that Civil Service does for people who work for Federal, State and Local Government. Once patronage is removed from an organization, the organization becomes much more open to the demands of public opinion in achieving its purpose.

Legislative

The second fact is that the way most of these proposals are presented showed that the senates were really performing a legislative role, despite the fact that almost universally they considered their role to be consultative. The form their action took most often was that of a legislative body sending a law to the executive branch for approval or veto. In this the senate filled a vacuum. Until Pastoral Councils are established and begin to function in terms of a steering committee for a synod which will legislate for the diocese, the legislative function has to be filled. This has led to a change in the way the senate was supposed to act according to the spirit of the Documents of Vatican Council II. Instead of existing as an advisory body with the bishops in their midst, it became a group independent of him, making proposals and legislating for the needs of the priests of the diocese. This function is a necessary one, but

it is important to realize that if we wish it to remain, steps must be taken to protect it. It really is not envisioned in the structure of the present law.

There is also a tendency to exclude the bishop from the operations of the senate. Sometimes this is done deliberately with the open declaration that it is better for the bishops not to participate for the sake of freedom. Sometimes it is more subtle and the bishop is declared to be welcome in the senate if he would like to come. The bishops receive the results of the senate meetings in all cases. This seems to come from a vision of the senate of priests as a voice from outside the diocesan structure. Not being part of the system, the senate can propose ideas and plans to the bishops which are not being and would not be proposed by those within it. It can aim at altering the functioning of the existing diocesan policies and agencies.

Role for Bishop

In an article prepared by Father Walter Mitchell, Chairman of the Research Committee of the Association of Brooklyn Clergy, and a senator of the diocese, he states, "It is this tendency which is disturbing. It gives strength to the false dichotomy between authority and the man under authority in the Church and it can lead to the failure of priests' senates to become truly effective in the government of the diocese." This comment is borne out by the fact that

the senates that have been most successful in having their proposals accepted are those in which the bishop plays an active role and undergoes the same educational experience as the senators do in their debates and committee reports.

Regardless of how this is viewed by various senates, it is most certainly a fact of life and the tendency to have a dichotomy between senates and bishops must be faced squarely in determining future operations of senates.

We might ask how successful senates are? In answer, they run a very wide gamut. Some are not successful and there are internal reasons for failure. Democratic processes are often hard to make work. A lack of understanding of power structure and decision making as it actually exists in a diocese was often not understood. The senates become frustrated as so much time was spent in writing a constitution and setting up the structure that some sort of a paralysis set in in their ability to function. They began to feel they must justify themselves by some sort of a success and successes were hard to come by. Projects have been delayed and proposals turned down. The morale in many senates is low.

Swapping Information

It is important for the senates to realize that a great deal of work and a great deal of understanding must take place before they are capable of fulfilling their function. This points to the need of a great

deal of help and manual assistance. In too many cases the same mistakes have been made over and over again; the same work duplicated. There is need for a great deal of swapping information, of combining research projects, and sharing proposals around. Also, nothing succeeds like success and the ability to have a proposal buttressed by the information that has already been accepted in 20 or 30 or 40 other dioceses, very often is a most telling argument.

Failure also happened because of external causes. The one most often mentioned was the non-cooperation and the lack of trust of diocesan officials. Often proposals are refused because it was claimed they were outside the present structure of law or that it was something that had to be decided on a national level. These factors are important and show the need of priests' senates being able to function at a level above that of the diocese. The future of the Church will be to a large extent in the hands of National Conferences of Bishops and the senates will have to be able to relate to them to be effective. In the future, law is going to be written at the national level. It should be written with a vivid consciousness of our American experience with priests' councils.

Total Concern

The future of senates lies in the broadening of their concerns to a total operation of the Church in all its details. If they are to help

in the government of the diocese, the pastoral needs must be looked upon as a whole. The field of social action as a concern of priests' senates is a very important point. The Church must face up to problems and there should be some vehicle through which the priests of a diocese or a nation must take a stand on important issues. The place of the layman in the Church should normally be taken care of by his own associations. However, until they are formed very often it is going to be a voice of priests' senates which will speak up for his place in the Church. Pastoral Councils, as we already mentioned, will function in the future, but until they do, the senates should concern themselves with the new structures by which the diocese can move ahead to solve modern problems especially pertinent to the laity.

Fraternity Exists

Many senates at the present moment are facing the problem of how to set up parish councils. This is especially true in New England where this seems to be the most popular response to lay needs. Also, senates have moved into the question of liturgical renewal, and we can expect a greater response in this area and we hope one that will be national in scope as it must be and with the cooperation of the National Liturgical Conference.

The things that have been mentioned show a great vitality exists in the Church in America. The

vitality stems from the fact of the fraternity that exists among priests. They seek common problems and are willing to work for common solutions. A sense of dignity has developed because they are now speaking to their bishops and conferring with them about the problems that are common concerns. There is also a deep-felt need of senates joining together sharing information and sharing in a community that meetings like this can bring about. The Church must function as a whole in our nation and for priests to take their full share of responsibility in this, some sort of national grouping of priests' senates and associations is important.

Before ending the paper, I would like to point out the development of priests' associations alongside that of senates. Father Decker will point out the differences, but in over 40 dioceses associations of priests are a fact of life. Senates perform the important consultative function of helping a bishop govern his diocese. Associations exist as an independent voice for the welfare of the whole people of God. The senate should be a wonderful example of

representative democracy. The association can function as an example of the town meeting type of participation that played such an important part in this nation's early history.

Personally Involved

The reasons why associations have sprung up are many. Basically, they enable individual priests to communicate with one another. The priest can feel he is personally involved. He has a sense of belonging. Also, through the operations of associations all of the priests can share in the education process that goes on as priests collectively look at the concerns and the affairs of the Church. They are also an important aid to the senate as they support it in its dealings with the bishop and can play a vital communication link in bringing information to the senate and also from the senate.

This is how the situation of priests' senates and associations appears to me at the present. So, in a sense, this is a type of state of the union message. Very briefly, the state of the union is good. But, it can be made much better.

Chapter 2

Goals and Guidelines for Priests' Councils

Rev. Raymond G. Decker

BEFORE I begin, let me define Priests' Councils, Priests' Associations and Priests' Senates. I do not submit my definitions as final, because these institutions being so new are still in a state of flux.

'Council' as we are using it at this conference seems to apply to any organization of priests within a diocese. It can be applied to either an association or a senate, although in some dioceses the word 'council' has been used to designate what some would call a 'senate.' The present gathering is called a Meeting of Councils because it is the coming together of all kinds of priests' organizations from various dioceses — some are senates, some are associations, and others are an amalgam of both.

The term '*priests' association*' can be defined as an organization of priests within a diocese to create

among themselves a genuine spirit of priestly fraternity, and based on this spirit, to develop a mutual appreciation of and desire for professionalism. As a grouping together to develop fraternity, an association has as one of its main functions that of creating the reality of community within the presbytery.

In realizing this fraternity an association should develop a genuine interest in professionalism. I do not mean creating a sense of aloofness and technical expertise which would tend to isolate priests as a professional group; I mean rather developing a genuine competence in theology and pastoral techniques which would help make each priest a more effective servant of his people. In a word, I would consider a priests' association as an organization of priests, by priests, for priests so that

through mutual assistance and collaboration they might better serve the people of God.

On the other hand, I would view *senates* as being quite different. Instead of being a fraternal and professional organization among the priests themselves, the senate or council is a representative body of the presbytery which forms a part of the official policy making structure of a diocese by being officially an advisory body to the bishop in expressing the consensus of thought and opinion of the presbytery.¹

Effective Assistance

This body of priests is explicitly provided for in the documents of Vatican Council II: *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Article 7,² *Christus Dominus*, Article 27³ and in the *Motu Proprio: Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Articles 15 and 17. As seen in this light and as explicitly expressed in the Council documents, the senate is "to give effective assistance to the bishop in his government of the diocese," which, in effect, means that priests forming a senate must assume the responsibility as co-workers in the episcopal order by assisting the bishop in his role as shepherd of the diocese as a whole as defined by Dr. L. M. Weber in his paper at the European Episcopal Con-

ference held in Amsterdam, July 12, 1967: The Council of Priests is an institution which

represents the presbytery as such and is, thereby, the more specific nucleus of diocesan (episcopal and presbyteral) government.⁴

In view of this distinction between priests' associations and senates, ideally every diocese should have both or some combination of both, since each has a unique function and each has its particular contribution to make to the Church as a whole.

Before proceeding, I would further distinguish between 'goals' and 'guidelines.' By 'goals' I mean the substantive aims of associations and senates; that is, what they should accomplish within the near future. By 'guidelines' I mean the procedures by which these goals are achieved.

With these basic definitions understood, we can now proceed to outline the 'goals' and 'guidelines' of associations and senates, keeping in mind, of course, that the goals and guidelines for each will often differ because of the distinction already mentioned between the two. I will first discuss associations and then senates.

Associations

The very first goal of priests' associations should be establishing communication within the presbytery of a diocese. This means 'dialogue,' and here I use the term in that hard dynamic sense as described by Philip Scharper and

1 L. M. Weber, "The Council of Priests," mimeographed copy of an address at the Conference of European Bishops, Amsterdam. The Netherlands, July 12, 1967, p. 3.

2 Walter M. Abbott, S.J. and Joseph Gallagher (Eds.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Guild Press, 1966) p. 547.

3. *ibid.* p. 416.

4 Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 6

quoted by Bishop Lawrence B. Casey of Paterson in his address to his Priests' Senate in its inaugural meeting on September 20, 1967:

. . . Dialogue obviously is a delicate undertaking — a dangerous one. . . . Dialogue means an authentic encounter between persons striving, at least to be authentic. . . . Dialogue therefore is a function of creative love — that love which hopes all things, bears all things and seeks not its own. Being creative, it makes the possible real and the impossible possible. It can always make, even of seemingly rotten timbers, a bridge across that abyss which permanently separates us from the other.⁵

Professionalism

Among many of the European theologians this spirit has been termed *bruderlichkeit*; that is, a brotherliness which is realized in the mutual support of helping one another to adjust psychologically and to effect structural changes in the Church so that the unique challenges of our age can be met. Hopefully, once this level of brotherliness is achieved within the presbytery this same spirit will permeate throughout the entire community of the people of God.

In addition to establishing an arena for communication, however,

the association of priests in any diocese should develop genuine professionalism characterized by competency in theology and pastoral techniques which enable the priest to function more effectively as the servant of his people, which is his true profession. In the pursuit of this professionalism it is required to keep the priests informed on the currents of theological, scriptural, pastoral and secular thought, which will enable them better to understand the great resources at their disposal and the needs of their people.

Hold Institutes

This, of course, can be accomplished only by associations taking upon themselves the responsibility of establishing institutes — highly intensified programs of education in which experts are engaged to expose priests to the present currents of thought and knowledge. These institutes can then be supplemented with seminars — discussion and study groups which serve as a followup on the institutes, and provide for the continuing education and intellectual stimulation of its members.

From the basis of a well formed and speculatively alert clergy the association should then be the medium through which the priests can speak up responsibly with a public voice, addressing themselves to the pastoral and social problems of their locality. Speaking through an association, unattached to any formal ecclesiastical structure,

⁵ Documentary Service, Press Department, United States Catholic Conference, September 22, 1967, p. 4.

there can be the articulation of a consensus which is most important both as a constructive witness of the Christian conscience of the presbytery and as a consequent leadership for the community of the Church as a whole.

With the accomplishment of these goals there can be instilled in a presbytery the concept of shared obligation in which all within the presbytery must assume the responsibility of service and leadership to the Christian community. This is not simply the task of the bishop or the chancery. All should be given the experience of sharing in responsible decisions. This concept of shared responsibility through communication and the expression of opinion was well expressed by Father James A. Laubacher in his address to the San Francisco Senate of Priests on January 16 when he said:

It is through this communication, participation, responsibility, information, mutual advice and counsel that the community actively realizes itself in the conscious and responsible exercise of faith. It must be admitted that in the past, in practice at least, authority was on one side of the fence and the subjects were on the other. Communication, responsibility, in-

formation was then the privilege of those who governed. The subjects were told what the rulers thought they should be told. With the rediscovery of the Church as community, authority in obedience to its faith, is at the service of the community and 'participation' of all members in the prophetic, priestly and governing mission of the Church is the accepted law, stemming from the very nature of the Church.⁶

Guidelines

The first guideline for any association should be to establish as full a representation of the presbytery as possible, so that it can truly reflect consensus. A means for achieving this is the plenary session. At a plenary session priests experience the dynamics of mutual support, and profit from the exchange and conflict of opinions and ideas. They experience solidarity with their fellow priests in the diocese.

To achieve this, however, associations must keep a tight rein on their organizational procedures. Moreover, they must strengthen their committee structure and they must clarify and enforce proper rules of meetings in order to assure all an equal opportunity to express themselves.

In setting goals and establishing procedural guidelines for associations it becomes more and more apparent with conferences such as this one, that we are aided and assisted by one another. To keep

⁶ James A. Laubacher, S.S., "Theology of Church and its Relation to the Concept and Role of Priests' Senates," mimeographed copy of an address delivered at the Two-day Conference of the Senate of Priests, Archdiocese of San Francisco, Menlo Park, California, January 16, 1968, p. 5.

in communication with other associations, therefore, is vitally necessary for the purpose of exchanging information. It is even more important, however, to achieve a broader consensus of thinking than that limited to our own individual dioceses, because there are few things which threaten to narrow our viewpoint more than provincialism.

This exchange between associations is becoming increasingly necessary as the thinking and feeling of one part of the Church in the United States affects the entire American Catholic community. Consequently there is need for priests to be associated with one another on a national as well as a local level. I am confident that the value of this will be experienced here during these two days as we mutually benefit from our exchange.

Senates

We pass now from associations to senates. I should like to remind you of the working distinction made between the two, emphasizing here that senates are a part of the official governmental structure of a diocese, which presents them with unique problems in their relations with the bishop, their relations with existing commissions, departments and other canonically and legally established diocesan structures. Many of these problems will naturally have to be resolved in a revision of canon law, which will more clearly reflect the spirit of collegiality as expressed

and manifested in Vatican Council II.

But for our purposes here today, and prescinding for the moment from these deeper questions, certain goals can be established for senates until such time that their exact nature and function hopefully become through experience more clearly delineated in law.

As indicated in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Christus Dominus*, a senate shares in the policy making function of the diocese as an advisory body to the bishop. A first goal of a senate, therefore, should be the hard evaluation of diocesan needs of a diocese. On the basis of this evaluation priorities should be established. Without priorities a senate will flounder and lose valuable time searching out its own role and identity and as a result, not address itself to the urgent pastoral needs of a diocese.

In the experience of many senates one of the areas of highest priority is personnel. I mean the location of priests according to their talents and self-evaluated preferences, and provision of sound retirement programs, rotation of pastorates and a multitude of other personnel needs which in many dioceses have been egregiously neglected.

To provide a successful program of that kind, a personnel board is indispensable. Collective decision making and expertise can be brought to bear on this important concern. This is particularly true in the larger dioceses of our country, where often talent lies un-

tapped, positions are filled out of desperation or expediency, and personal favoritism plays no small part in the placement of priests. The creation of an effective personnel board should be one of the goals of highest priority for the senate in a diocese of any significant size.

Constant Contact

Since the senate is to represent the presbytery in an advisory capacity to the episcopacy, it is necessary for the senate or council to maintain close communication with all the priests. This can be achieved through close contact with the Association of Priests (if there is one in a diocese). It can also be achieved through direct contact with the constituents which would reflect the thinking particular to the priests of a certain age or locale. Regardless of the procedure of communication, the very concept of senate necessitates the establishment of open and continuing communication between the senate and the presbytery of the diocese. In the words of Professor Weber in the paper cited above,

the senate must be comprehensive, free and democratic. It is comprehensive when personal horizontal and vertical channels of communication are given so that the serious wishes formulated in discussion groups with priestly brothers are left untouched in their course from the bot-

tom to the top where they are to be heard. It is *free* when it comes into being according to personal points of view and not according to functional considerations of sort simply imposed from above. . . . The council is democratic when the way of election and of speaking to the bishop are such that they include the voice and word of all.⁷

Creative Programs

Because the senate is to function in the words of the Ecumenical Council "as an advisory group on all matters especially pastoral," it has the responsibility of providing for programs of research and development in all areas of concern to a diocese—personnel, financial, and pastoral. Most especially is it true that a senate has the responsibility to set as one of its priority goals that of providing research which will lead to creative pastoral programs which will be genuinely responsive to the human and religious needs unique to the inner city, rural areas, minority groups and poverty pockets of our society.

As a pastorally-orientated advisory group to the bishop, the senate should devise every means possible to bring the resources of the people of God to bear on the social and economic problems of the society, and this can be done only through realistic research and planning—using all the modern techniques of the social sciences so as to direct effectively the well

⁷ Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

intentioned and religiously motivated resources of the Church toward meeting the often inter-related social and religious needs of our society.

Open and Frank

In effect the main goal of any senate is to be an effective advisory body to the bishop—one which is characterized by creativity and initiative. But to be a truly effective advisor, one must be independent of the one he is advising—independent in the sense that he has different sources of information and that he speaks his mind in honesty, openness and absolute frankness. As Cardinal Suhard reminded us in his great pastoral letter, *Priests Among Men*:

One of the priest's first services to the world is to tell it the truth.⁸

And, if this is his service to the world, how much more should this be his service to his bishop? To safeguard these qualities in the senate, it is necessary to keep it independent from the bishop and the chancery in its thinking and deliberations. Then what it brings to him in an advisory capacity will be fresh and unincumbered. Although the senate is intimately united with the bishop in the governance of the diocese, at the same time it must maintain a healthy independence in its deliberations if it is to give effective, realistic and meaningful advice. This is a sub-

ject which I think should be seriously considered in your workshops, because it is at the very heart of the concept of collegiality. This goal of independence is so greatly to be desired that senates should petition to remain in existence even after the bishop dies, as provided for in the *Motu Proprio, Christus Dominus*. The senate is to be truly representative of the presbytery of a diocese and the presbytery does not change with the death of a bishop.

Assist Laity

In keeping with its nature as a body representing the presbytery concerned with pastoral matters, another main goal of senates should be to assist the laity in the creation of pastoral councils. Senates should wish these councils to be representative of the full spectrum of thought in the diocese. The senates should try to develop a relationship with the pastoral council which would insure the council's autonomy. Thus the council could freely reflect the thinking of the laity and participate in the decision making areas where they are so pre-eminently competent.

Moreover, this will help to insure a spirit of collaboration and cooperation will characterize the relationship between these two bodies. The laity at this particular point in the history of the American Church needs the understanding and leadership from the priests' senates and councils if they are to overcome their psychology of sub-

⁸ Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, *Priests Among Men*. (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, Inc. 1960), p. 40.

servience and to take the initiative in bringing their frequently superior knowledge and talents to bear in the creation and operation of these pastoral councils.

There are no magic formulae or tested techniques which will inerantly bring these goals into being, for as Bishop Casey of Paterson so well expressed it in his address which I cited above:

We are walking along a new road and it is likely we may at times take the wrong fork. But no need to turn back. Those who act out of love of God have His guidance and assurance that they will reach their destination. It is better to be wrong occasionally than to be always irrelevant.⁹

Guidelines

There are no guidelines to insure a senate's success. But there are some guidelines which, if they do not insure success, at least make the task easier. For any senate it is indispensable to have regular meetings with the bishop. Thus it can communicate its proposals to him and explain the reasons for its conclusions, and, inturn, can receive the bishop's reaction to these conclusions. This establishes a formal arena for dialogue between the bishop and his priests which is so important for the Church as a whole.

To proceed with effectiveness toward the goals so far outlined, it is necessary to conduct senate

meetings with genuine professionalism and at times parliamentary precision. If the matters discussed are as important as indicated, they require serious attention at meetings.

Coordination

Moreover, if the senate is to address itself effectively to the problems indicated, it will be necessary to provide adequate committee structure. In committee structure much of the tedious work of research and planning is accomplished without paralyzing the senate as a whole with excessive detail.

As the work load of senates increases it will become imperative for the priest chairman or executive secretary to be given full time to coordinate the work of the various committees and to handle the routine procedures. Such an arrangement would relieve the senators from these mechanical and administrative details which are, nevertheless, so important for the smooth operation of a group of this size. The success or failure of a senate will depend almost exclusively on how seriously the senators consider their responsibilities, a fact that will be concretely manifested by their willingness, and that of the bishop, to provide a full-time priest who will coordinate the vast scope of its work.

Needless to say, just as in the case of associations, so too in the case of senates, there is need for continued communication, so that each can share in the experience of others. How especially true this

⁹ Documentary Service, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

is at this moment in history, when the form and shape of these senates and councils are being determined more by trial and error than by any preconceived plan. We, therefore, have need of one another, so that we can profit by one another's failures and successes—understanding that what success any of us enjoys has been achieved only through repeated trials and frequent failures. At this time, perhaps more than any other time, we must keep in mind those sage words of John Henry Newman:

In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.¹⁰

Area of Collaboration

Before I conclude this morning, I should like to make one final suggestion concerning a matter which I think is of the utmost importance as we move into a new era in the history of the Church of the United States—a matter which offers a singularly significant opportunity for mutual collaboration of all priests councils whether associations or senates. It is this, that all of us in and through our priests' organizations should be moving toward having a more significant voice in the selection of bishops. In the past few months we have witnessed the request for such a

voice from priests of lesser or greater number in the Archdioceses of New York and St. Louis and in the Dioceses of Green Bay and Wilmington. At first this seems to be a somewhat startling innovation, but it is not without precedent in the history of the American Church, and certainly not in the Universal Church. According to Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, the noted historian of American Catholicism, in his article "On Selecting American Bishops," which appeared in the March 10, 1967, issue of *Commonweal*, in 1788 a committee of three priests

acting in the name of all their number . . . addressed a petition for a bishop to Pope Pius VI. The request was granted and on November 6, 1789 the priests' choice, Father John Carroll, was appointed Bishop of Baltimore.¹¹

Selection of Bishops

Likewise the next two men appointed to the American hierarchy, Laurence Graessl and Leonard Neale, were also choices of the priests in an election. Moreover, from 1885 to 1916 the diocesan consultors and irrevocable rectors of American dioceses had the right of drawing up a *terna* when their bishop died, resigned or was transferred, but they lost it in 1916 when too many of them leaked the names on the *ternae*. Based upon this early American experience, and in keeping with the growing need of collegiality of the presbytery with the episcopacy in the United States,

10 John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 10th edition. (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1897), p. 40.

11 John Tracy Ellis, "On Selecting American Bishops," *The Commonweal*, LXXXV (March 10, 1967), p. 643.

it can scarcely be denied that great benefit would accrue to the total Church if priests in their respective associations, senates, and councils were to be given a significant voice in the selection of bishops. A device of this kind could conceivably contribute more effectively in the choosing of bishops more pastorally minded than curial and canonically oriented.

Nor is this beyond practical solution, for it would seem conceivable that priests could submit their *ternae*, and that an accumulated *terna* could be made up from these, or the senators could submit *ternae* which would reflect the choices of their respective constituents. Once the principle and value of having the priests contribute more substantially to the choice of bishops are admitted, then the mere procedural formalities could be easily devised.

Conclusion

This morning we have considered many facets of priests' councils, associations and senates both in terms of their brief history in

12 *Mathew, 20:27-28* (Jerusalem Bible)

the United States and in view of their future. Perhaps we have attempted to consider too many sides, and as a result we may have become somewhat confused and overwhelmed. Oddly enough, however, in this very confusion and perplexity, we are witnesses to a magnificent time in the Church's history as the Spirit of God works not only through Vatican Council II on a universal level, but as He also breathes in the Church of this country as a whole and in the various churches in different parts of the nation. And, indeed, the Holy Spirit at times does breath in confusion with sound and fury as He did on that first Pentecost Sunday. In faith and hope we can see in this fury the Spirit of Christ renewing His priests in keeping with His admonition:

Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. ¹²

Chapter 3

Rationale for a National Organization

Rev. John J. Hill

IT is a secret to no one that the Catholic priesthood is in the midst of agonizing self-appraisal. The questions being asked about the nature and role of the priesthood today are basic. It is even asked if the priesthood as we know it presently—a sort of elite caste in the Church—should continue to exist.

Some who have observed priests disagreeing with each other are bewildered. They say that the priesthood used to be a bulwark for their own Catholicity. But now, they say, priests have begun to sort out their vocational problems in public and no longer present a united front to the world. For these observers, the image of the priesthood has considerably deteriorated. In their minds, the decreasing number of vocations and the increasing number of priests leaving the priesthood are related to

this deterioration. They point to the statement made recently by Father Edward Schillebeeckx that within three years 10,000 American priests will leave the Church. That statement, they say, is evidence that the situation of the Catholic priest in the United States is worsening.

We are assembled here tonight to comment on these pessimistic predictions. We affirm that they shall not come to pass. For the priesthood will be shaped not just by historical currents, but by priests themselves. We stand in solidarity with other priests of our age whose lives testified to the capacity of priests to shape events and times—yes, to shape history.

I think of Virgil Michel, John Ryan, Joseph Cardijn, Teilhard de Chardin, and John Courtney Murray. In their spirit this evening we say: "We have come together so

that we might work and plan together. We look forward to an exciting new priesthood whose lines are as yet unclear to us, a priesthood which underscores service, challenge, imagination, vision, freedom, and professionalism. We shall move toward that priesthood by taking steps which are coordinated and deliberate, changing those things which we have a responsibility to change."

That we have come today from every major urban center in the United States, including Honolulu, is an expression of our desire to collaborate on a national level; for we shall not let it be said that in these uncertain times we failed to come together, that we failed to act.

Nationwide

We have already taken the first step toward national collaboration by coming together at this meeting. The second step will be to bring into being an organization which will enable the senates and associations to work together. Together with the laity, the religious sisters and brothers, the hierarchy, and—in many cases—with our fellow Christians of other churches, we shall plan and build. We shall help to build for the Church structures, systems and programs. We shall help to build whatever will be needed for the Church to meet successfully the challenges of these precarious times.

In a report to be given tomorrow afternoon, guidelines for a national organization of priests'

councils will be proposed. This assembly willing, the committee shall invite the priests' councils of the United States to participate in the formation of this organization. Such a nationwide organization would act through a board elected by the councils themselves. It would recommend a plan for coordinating the workload of member councils, and arrange for the exchange of position papers and other technical materials useful for the operation of priests' councils, recommend new programs of research and action, give periodic reports to the National Conference of Bishops, speak publicly about matters of concern to the Church, whenever it deems it appropriate to speak thus. It would enable the priests to form their own consensus so that when they collaborate with the laity, the hierarchy, and with religious sisters and brothers, they would be able to collaborate more effectively. In short, a national organization of priests' councils would enable the priests to act and speak as a body.

Efficiency

Such an organization will make it possible for priests' senates and associations to operate with greater efficiency. Duplication will be avoided. Instead of fifty priests' councils addressing themselves to the problem of developing personnel boards, the matter would be considered by a much smaller number of councils. The results of their research would then be conveyed to all.

Senates and associations will find that their proposals will more likely meet with success. For the proposals will often have behind them an impressive measure of research and the general approval of priests' groups throughout the country. Such proposals are easier to implement.

Assist in Theology

Because the efficiency of priests' councils will be improved, they will be able to achieve their goals more easily—and sooner. We refer to the educational programs to help priests absorb the great volume of theological content of the last five years, preparing them for the new forms which the priesthood may take in the years to come; other programs to facilitate communication between the bishop and his priests and among the priests themselves; the whole range of social action programs which professional priests' councils can address themselves to—programs dealing with civil rights, housing, education, and employment—and with other critical areas; retirement boards with sound planning to enable priests to retire with purpose and with dignity; personnel boards so useful for the reasonable placement of priests in the work of the diocese.

A national organization of priests' councils, because it would improve the efficiency of the participating councils, would make it possible for the goals we have just described to be accomplished more easily and sooner.

But a national organization of individual priests' councils would do more than improve the effectiveness of individual priests' councils. It will also enable them to work in concert on problems which transcend the capacity of an individual priests' council. Though there are many such problems, let us speak about four.

Personnel

First, the problem of personnel seen from a national viewpoint. Several questions must be asked. Should there be personnel boards—not just in those dioceses which presently have them or are planning them, but in every diocese? Should they have access to the finest national expertise available to the field of personnel? Should a priest who wants to serve in a ministry other than the parish ministry be able to do so with facility? Should a priest who wants to work for periods of time in an area of the country other than the one in which he was ordained, be able to do so easily? Should a study be made to determine if priests are placed where they are most needed?

A national organization of priests' councils would make it possible for the priests' councils of this country to study such questions and effect answers to them.

Secondly, there is the matter of the priests' role in the Church. For priests around the country are asking basic questions about their lives. How should they spend their time each day? How meaningful

will it be for them to become trained in secular skills and involved in secular fields? What should the contribution of the priesthood be in today's technically sophisticated world? Should there be a particular competence for the priest today? If so, what should be the nature of that competence?

Experimentation

The task of determining the role of the priest cannot be solved by priests alone, for it is a problem of the whole Church and it must be solved by the whole Church. But it will not be solved without the effort of priests to solve it. Critical to the solution will be coordinated pastoral experimentation of sufficient volume to be valid. Experimental ministries dealing with present parochial structures, experimental ministries dealing with other than parochial structures, team ministries, personal ministries, all will be useful.

Such experimentation will produce answers to such pragmatic questions as "How can a priest use his time most productively?" "What things are possible and desirable for him to do?" "What forms of the ministry create the best relationships with the people of God?" "What kind of training is needed for those preparing to be priests?"

With such a quantity of action and evaluation, today's theologians will have something of substance to work with. Little by little, the shape of a new priesthood will be-

come clear. The next generation of priests will take their direction from this large effort. It will be our contribution to them.

Such experimentation, to be initiated and carried on by the whole Church, will be impossible without the cooperation of the priests of the country. Their contribution to this effort must be reasonably ordered. A national organization of priests' councils would help it to be so.

New Modus Quo

Let me introduce a *third* important goal to be achieved by a national organization of priests' councils. I refer to professionalism in the priesthood.

The American priest a half generation ago could describe himself as a professional man. Before he entered upon his career as a parish priest he had mastered an impressive amount of highly technical material. We all know this. But that kind of professionalism is disappearing from the priesthood. The times, the new problems, the new complex modes of looking at the world, all indicate the need for a new modus quo, a new style for the priesthood. The style must be professional.

Professionalism calls for particular competence. Professional people do not consider themselves experts in every area of life; just in one area. The idea that a priest's competence can at the same time include liturgy, psychology, youth organizations, education, community organization, civil rights, and

several other areas is not professional.

Professionalism calls for self-determination. For professional people working together as colleagues determine the direction of their careers, the priorities of their careers, and the standards by which their performance is judged.

Professionalism calls for fraternal respect and collaboration. It makes one professional man call another professional man his colleague. Finally, professionalism calls for excellence of performance. The goal of the collaboration of any group of colleagues must be to develop the capacity to perform well.

Excellence in Service

All these elements should flow into our priesthood. As the role of the priest becomes clearer to us, we should be aiming toward that particular competence most appropriate to the priest. We should be working together in a new professional relationship as colleagues. We should be determining, as far as we can, the circumstances under which we can best operate—and the goals which seem to be most judicious. The goal of our collaboration must be the growing excellence of our service to the people of God and to the bishops.

Such professionalism must be felt not just in the priests' councils of the nation, but in the life of every priest. He must be able to organize professionally his hours, his days, his years, his life, his

living space, his working space—so that there is about them all the characters of order, purpose and excellence. Priests must be able to experience a new pride in their collegial cooperation and in the increased excellence of their performance.

This task of introducing a new professionalism into the priests' councils and into the life of the American priest would be greatly expedited by the establishment of a national organization of priests' councils.

There is a *fourth* goal to which a national organization might address itself. Since both papers this morning explained this point, I will just touch on it. Several dioceses in the United States have already indicated their desire to have something to say about the appointment of a bishop. The question implies three minor questions: First, what should be the qualifications of bishops? Secondly, what should be their tenure? Thirdly, what place should the laity, the clergy, and the hierarchy have in the selection of the properly qualified one? These questions, while they might be touched upon by senates or associations of particular dioceses, would be more thoroughly treated by the appropriate committees convened by a national organization of priests' councils.

Priest/Bishop Relations

One result of a national organization would be the improvement of the relationship between priests and their bishop. I now address

this point. Sometimes this relationship, on the part of the priest, is unmanly, unprofessional, and untruthful. Sometimes it is marred by crippling fears and hostilities. Priests are not to be blamed for this poor relationship; or are bishops. The blame is to be placed on an administrative system which makes a priest completely dependent on a bishop for the direction and scope of his career.

In most cases, it is the bishop who decides what assignment a priest shall have, and for how long he shall have it. In many dioceses, to this day, priests are not consulted about their assignments. This point does not have to be expanded. Everyone here knows what we mean when we say that priests are often in a relationship of total dependency on their bishops.

Hurts the Church

This system had its merit at one time in the history of the Church. It was a serviceable instrument for dealing with the complex task of appointing appropriate people to their work in the Church. There was even a kind of military efficiency to the system. So the system should not be treated as though it never had any merit.

But that system must be considerably modified, if not replaced, today because as it is now, it hurts the whole Church. It hurts the priest because it inclines him to say only those things which please his bishop, for he does not want to displease the man on whom his

entire career depends. No one does. As a result, he sometimes feels he is not a man. To compensate for this, he assails the bishop behind the bishop's back and blames him for all the woes of the Church.

Such an administrative system obviously does not challenge a priest to use his own judgment and to be imaginative. Much is lost to the Church because of this.

The system we presently have also hurts the bishop because it deprives him of his right to know the full truth about his diocese. The loss of truth in a diocese is a serious thing.

It goes without saying that the laity also suffer from the system. They are deprived of the imaginative and aggressive leadership of their priests. And they can sense the nervous tension between the bishop and his priests.

Through a national organization of priests, the priests' councils of the United States would be able to address themselves to the system. It can be changed. It has already begun to be modified in those dioceses which have effective personnel boards. But much work—much work—remains.

Freeze Status

Let me mention parenthetically that if there were a priests' union, the priest/bishop relationship would worsen. A union implies that a bishop is the employer of a priest. Such a relationship would freeze the priest in a status which he, given the nature of his calling, would

find demeaning and wholly unsatisfying. It would intensify the priest/bishop polarity which is at the heart of the problem.

Another unacceptable factor in the idea of a union of priests is that a union's reason for being is the advancement of the members' condition. Our own calling indicates that we must have a larger sense. If we are interested in the life and problems of priests themselves, it is for two reasons. When men first come together, they come together to talk about those things which they have in common. Such issues as personnel boards, retirement boards, are quite appropriate now. But we are also interested in these matters because we know that until we sort these problems out we cannot address ourselves to the larger matters before the Church and society. Our view is not myopic. We are looking to ourselves now—but only that we might later look to the Church and the world. Such an expansive outlook would not obtain in a priests' union.

Not against Unions

It goes without saying that these comments are not meant as a critical judgment against unions.

We have referred to many problems which contribute to the deteriorating morale of many priests. But the morale of the priests in this country will be substantially improved when they understand that priests have come together in a professional organization to address themselves to these problems.

And as these problems are answered—and problems do have answers—a large measure of hope will return to many priests who have lost hope in recent years.

The morale of lay people will also be raised. They will see that we are not letting the times get worse. We are not letting the confusion grow. We have come together and are beginning to form our consensus. They will see that we are building, and that what we are building is beautiful and full of hope.

To the bishops of the United States we say: We are united with you in the mission of the Church. We are anxious to collaborate with you, with the laity, and with the religious communities of men and women. Together we can achieve what has to be achieved.

Accept Challenge

To all who observe our action, we say: We have not lost our sense of priority. We know that there are problems of more importance than whether or not there is a personnel board in a diocese. We have not forgotten Vietnam, Detroit, our decaying cities, the massive injustices meted out to black people in our day. But it will take a little time to get them in our sights.

We do not recoil from the tasks which face the Church today. We run to meet them. Together we shall meet them with the energy and intelligence which the problems demand. Others may complain that they are living in the anguish of transition. We rejoice

that the challenges which face us are arduous. We shall move deliberately. We shall not move with the assumption that we have all the answers. We shall not move in hostility to any person or any group of persons in or out of the Church. We shall not move thinking that all problems will be answered soon. We shall not move thinking that the going will be easy. But we shall move.

Finally, let us not mislead anyone into thinking that we are about something we think of only moderate value. The work of uniting the priests' councils of the

United States is a seed, the seed of democracy. We intend to bring to the life of the Church in the United States the richness of the democratic tradition so that the Church in its structures and systems will be less medieval and monarchial and more relevant to the needs of our very modern day. We are about a very serious effort to enrich the Church profoundly. We would have no one think we were planning anything less.

In Ecclesiastes we read that there is time to tear down and a time to build. What we say tonight is that now is the time to build.

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